

Hart Van Denburg, St. Paul News

Will this help? Rep. Betty McCollum has introduced, and Keith Ellison has cosponsored, a U.S. House resolution calling on the Rwandan government to release accused genocide denier William Mitchell law professor Peter Erlinder from prison.

She's hoping an appeal to that country's self-proclaimed adherence to the rule of law and humanitarianism -- as well as its need for foreign aid from the U.S. -- will bring him home.

Erlinder was arrested in May after entering the country to defend Victoire Ingabire, who is accused of denying the 1994 Rwandan genocide, collaborating with a terrorist organization and inciting ethnic hatred.

The charge against Erlinder is "genocide ideology," which to the ruling regime means he denies the accepted explanation of the genocide's cause: The planned massacre by rebel Hutus of Tutsis and moderate.

Shorthand: He's a genocide denier -- something his wife, friends and colleagues deny. Erlinder, they say, knows that hundreds of thousands of people died in the genocide, but is challenging why they died.

Since his arrest, he's been subject to interrogation, denied bail and is now being detained at a prison in Kigali

The resolution calls on Rwanda's government to respect its own constitution," Resolved to build a State governed by the rule of law, based on respect for fundamental human rights, pluralistic democracy, equitable power sharing, tolerance and resolution of issues through dialogue."

And it reminds Rwanda, none too subtly, that the African nation might want to play ball since it's the recipient of much largesse from Uncle Sam, which has, "Provided over \$1,034,000,000 billion in United States taxpayer-funded foreign assistance to Rwanda since 2000, and an additional \$240,200,000 is proposed in the President's fiscal year 2011 budget."